

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2053

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 0770

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, ELAB, SN

SUBJ: STUDENT LEADER SENTENCED TO JAIL

REF: A. SINGAPORE 4461 OF 5 NOV 1974; B. SINGAPORE 0341

1. THE MARATHON 46-DAY TRIAL OF UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE STUDENTS' UNION PRESIDENT TAN WAH PIOW AND TWO CO-DEFENDANTS ON RIOTING CHARGES ENDED FEBRUARY 22 WHEN ALL WERE FOUND GUILTY. TAN WAS SENTENCED TO ONE YEAR IN JAIL. TAN'S CO-DEFENDANTS, TWO YOUNG INDUSTRIAL WORKERS, WERE SENTENCED TO ONLY A MONTH IN JAIL BECAUSE THE JUDGE HELD THEM TO BE "MERE PAWNS IN TAN'S HANDS."

2. THE DEFENSE CALLED ELEVEN WITNESSES TO REFUTE PROSECUTION'S CONTENTION THAT TAN AND CO-DEFENDANTS ENTERED PIONEER INDUSTRIES EMPLOYEES UNION (PIEU) HEADQUARTERS AND SUBSEQUENTLY BROKE WINDOWS AND OVERTURNED FURNITURE DURING AN OCTOBER 30, 1974 DEMONSTRATION BY RETRENCHED WORKERS FROM AMERICAN MARINE SHIPYARD AND STUDENT SUPPORTERS (REF A). TAN CHARGED THAT HE WAS THE VICTIM OF A FRAME-UP DIRECTED BY PIEU GENERAL SECRETARY PHEY YEW KOK.

3. THE JUDGE DECLARED THAT "THE DEFENSE OF A FRAME-UP IS A MISERABLE AND MISCHIEVOUS ATTEMPT THAT HAS ALTOGETHER FAILED. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT HAS BEEN PROVEN TO THE HILT THAT THE THREE ACCUSED AND

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THEIR WITNESSES HAVE FABRICATED EVIDENCE TO PERVERT THE COURSE OF

JUSTICE...". TAN REPLIED SARCASTICALLY "I CONGRATULATE YOU ON YOUR FUTURE PROMOTION TO THE HIGH COURT...".

4. OVER 500 STUDENTS AND WORKERS GATHERED OUTSIDE THE COURTROOM DURING THE FINAL COURT SESSION. MANY OF THE WORKERS WORE T-SHIRTS AND HELMETS EMBLAZONED WITH THE UNION EMBLEM TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS MEMBERS OF PIEU OR ITS SISTER UNION SILO. THESE WORKERS WERE APPARENTLY MOBILIZED BY THE UNION LEADERS TO COUNTERACT THE PRESENCE OF TAN'S STUDENT SUPPORTERS, AND TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE UNION RANK-AND-FILE DOES NOT SUPPORT TAN. EARLIER IN THE TRIAL, TWO FORMER OFFICIALS OF PIEU'S AMERICAN MARINE BRANCH HAD TESTIFIED ON TAN'S BEHALF.

5. CAMPUS REACTION SO FAR HAS BEEN NIL. ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE VERDICT COINCIDED WITH THE START OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE'S ANNUAL EXAM PERIOD. CAMPUS POSTERS ANNOUNCED THE VERDICT BUT STATED THAT IT WOULD BE POINTLESS TO CALL FOR PROTEST DEMONSTRATIONS DURING EXAM PERIOD (WHICH WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A PROLONGED VACATION).

6. THE TRIAL WAS HEAVILY PUBLICIZED BY BOTH CHINESE AND ENGLISH PRESS. FRONT-PAGE PICTURES OF TAN APPEARED IN BOTH ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PAPERS ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23.

7. COMMENT: THE VERDICT CAME AS NO SURPRISE. MOST OBSERVERS HAVE LONG BELIEVED THAT THE VERDICT WAS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION AND THAT THE ONLY QUESTION WOULD BE THE SEVERITY OF THE SENTENCE. THE DEFENSE PRESENTED A BATTERY OF WITNESSES WHOSE TESTIMONY THE JUDGE DECIDED TO REJECT. THE JUDGE ACCEPTED WITHOUT QUESTION THE VERACITY OF PROSECUTION WITNESSES AND EXPLAINED AWAY WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS "APPARENT DISCREPANCIES" IN PHEY YEW KOK'S TESTIMONY. SEVERAL YOUNG LAWYERS COMMENTED TO EMBOFF THAT THE JUDGE HAD ACTED MORE AS PROSECUTOR THAN AS INDEPENDENT ARBITER.

8. THE ALREADY WIDELY-HELD ASSUMPTION THAT SINGAPORE'S JUDICIARY IS SUBJECT TO GOS INFLUENCE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE REINFORCED BY THE OUTCOME OF THIS TRIAL. MANY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND YOUNG PROFESSIONALS WILL BE INDIGNANT OVER THE OUTCOME, BUT FEW IF ANY WILL BE PREPARED TO PROTEST THE VERDICT, ESPECIALLY DURING EXAM TIME. THE CASE WILL BE REMEMBERED, HOWEVER, AND WILL CONSTITUTE ONE MORE FACTOR IN THE GROWING ESTRANGEMENT AND ALIENATION BETWEEN THE POLITIC

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ESTABLISHMENT AND AN INCREASING SEGMENT OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF EDUCATED SINGAPOREANS. CRONK

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